DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 796 EC 220 558

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TITLE The International Dimensions of the Council for Exceptional Children: A Proposal for Future Directions.
PUB DATE Apr 89
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 3-7, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Comparative Education; *Disabilities; *Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; *International Cooperation; *International Education; Organizations (Groups); *Special Education; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *Council for Exceptional Children

ABSTRACT

The paper offers a historical perspective on international special education, describes activities of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) in the international arena, and suggests future directions. Briefly noted are the history of special education and the rise of such international groups as Rehabilitation International, the International League of Societies for Persons with Mental Handicap, the International Association of Workers for Troubled Children and Youth, the European Association for Special Education, and the International Association of Special Education. Activities of CEC in furthering international special education are recounted and include the prominent role of Canada, leadership for a U.S. mission to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1972, the First World Congress on Future Special Education held in Scotland in 1978, and establishment of an International Relations Committee. Five goals and objectives are proposed for the organization's future. They are: (1) establish a clear policy about CEC's commitment to international special education; (2) work towards the formation of a worldwide organization or council of organizations dedicated to special education; (3) promote the dissemination of special education information worldwide; (4) establish a network of programs and contacts that permit educators to gain relevant experience abroad; and (5) promote international research in special education. (DB)

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# The International Dimensions of the Council for Exceptional Children: A Proposal for Future Directions

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Paper presented to the Statespersons' Roundtable at the 1989 CEC Convention in San Francisco

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# The International Dimensions of the Council for Exceptional Children: A Proposal for Future Directions

## Introduction

The Council for Exceptional Children has since its inception had an international dimension. The nature and strength of its involvements have fluctuated over time. In the past several years there has within CEC been a surge of new interest in reaching out to other countries in our common quest to serve young people with special needs.

This paper will begin with an historical overview of international special education. It will then describe the nature of CEC's involvements and activities as an internationally oriented organization and will conclude with some recommendations for future directions.

## Historical Perspectives

Records of sporadic attempts to help children with special needs go back to the Middle Ages, but the first systematic educational provisions for children with handicaps did not begin to appear until the middle and end of the 18th century. In 1749 Perière, a native of Spain, reported before the Academy of Science in Paris his success in teaching a congenital deaf-mute

to speak and read. Heinecke in Germany started a school for the hearing handicapped in 1778, and in 1784 Abbé de l'Epée established an institution for the blind in Paris. In 1798 another Frenchman Itard began his famous experiment to educate the "wild boy of Avevron," and about the same time Pestalozzi in Switzerland founded his first school for young destitute and abandoned war victims and began a revolution in the treatment of troubled children.

What these pioneers and others that followed had in common was a strong and positive public response from around the world. Educators flocked to them in large numbers to learn about their methods of teaching, and some became celebrated consultants to governments and heads of state. Also Americans who wanted to work with the handicapped, such as Samuel Gridley Howe and Thomas Gallaudet, travelled to Europe to study under them before they started their own programs.

Throughout the 19th century a number of educators made a lasting impact on the international arena. One might mention Braille, the inventor of a dot alphabet for the blind and Sequin who devised new approaches in teaching the mentally retarded and who spent his professional life both in France and in the United States.

Towards the end of the century Maria Montessori began through her work with children in institutions in Italy to evolve a philosophy and a method of instruction that continue to have great relevance both in regular and special education.

Since the Second World War, the United States has assumed a dominant role in the human services fields. Hitler's domination of Europe led to the exodus of a large number of brilliant leaders in the caring professions, who found in the United States a fertile climate for their creativity. With its humanitarian ideals, its economic resources, and its scientific and future-directed ethos, America has gained an undisputed leadership in the human services fields in theory, research, and program development, and American professional literature predominates both in quality and quantity. It has also become common and favored practice for students in other parts of the world to come to the United States for their professional training.

Throughout the 19th century interest groups and organizations related to specific disabilities began to appear, and they often had international dimensions. A dramatic example was a Congress on the Education of the Deaf which was held in Milan, Italy, in 1880 and

which for better or for worse voted against the use of sign language and advocated the oral method.

With the advent of the 20th century many voluntary and charitable organizations became concerned about the welfare of handicapped children both in their own countries and abroad. An example is the Catholic Caritas International which carries on numerous projects in third world countries and the German Christoffel Blindenmission, an interdenominational Christian organization which since 1908 served blind people throughout the world. Similar initiatives were taken by the Canadian Institute for the Blind whose director E.A. Baker was a prime mover in the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind.

In the United States, the International Society for the Welfare of Cripples was founded in 1922. It later changed its name to the International Society for Rehabilitation of the disabled or Rehabilitation International as its purposes expanded. It is now the leading world organization in the disability field and comprises 125 national voluntary and governmental organizations in 77 countries and 9 international member organizations. Rehabilitation International has four standing committtees one of which is devoted to education.

One of the important members is the International League of Societies for Persons with Mental Handicap. It is a strong advocate for the normalization principle and was instrumental in having the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Handicapped persons being adopted in 1971 by the United Nations. Among its many outstanding leaders belong Rosemary and Gunnar Dywad who are well known to many in CEC.

Particularly in the Francophile world the International Association of Workers for Troubled Children and Youth has since 1951 advanced the cause of young people with adjustment problems. In 1990 it will hold the first of its world congresses in the United States. The CEC is one of the sponsors and Thomas Reilly of the Council for Children with Behavior Disorders is on the planning committee.

Prominent among the international teachers organizations covering all the disability groups is the European Association for Special Education (EASE). It came into being in 1968 at a meeting in Sweden when representatives from a dozen Western European countries convened to form an international association. There are no members from Eastern Europe, but a cooperative relationship exists with special educators in the socialist countries.

The objectives of EASE are accomplished in part by means of small seminars and larger world conferences. One held in Helsinki, Finland, had 1,700 participants from 30 countries and four continents. For many years the president of EASE was Olof Magne from Sweden. He can rightly be called, "Mr. European Special Education." After the end of his tenure, he continues to work for his vision of not just European but global cooperation, and his current focus is on developing closer links with the Eastern European countries.

In 1986 the International Association of Special Education was formed under the energetic leadership of Marg Csapo at the University of British Columbia. It publishes the International Journal of Special Education and will hold its first international conference in May, 1989.

Since its inception, the United Nations has taken an active part in promoting the welfare of the handicapped, and its 1975 Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons has served in many countries as a model for legislation and as a guide for interventions. All the agencies have contributed to different facets of prevention and rehabilitation, but UNESCO has made its mark in special education. This section was for many years headed by

Nils-Ivar Sundberg. From his tiny office in the UNESCO headquarters in Paris and with a small budget this humble and soft-spoken man became with his efforts and devotion a catalyst for much action throughout the world. His untimely death at a UNESCO sponsored conference in Spain in 1981 was a great loss to the profession.

A promising example of cooperation between the developing and the industrial world is the Lusaka College for Teachers of the Handicapped in Zambia. The college is partly supported by the international development authorities in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and these countries also provide instructors. The college has one year curricula for teachers of the visually and hearing impaired, the physically handicapped, and the mentally retarded. The students come from several countries in eastern and southern Africa.

The Council for Exceptional Children

Our organization was formed in 1922 at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City, when a group of professionals representing Canada, India, South Africa, Sweden, and the United States met and founded the International Council for the Education of Exceptional Children. The name was later changed to the International Council for Exceptional Children,

and in 1958 the word "International" was dropped and it assumed its present title.

The transformations, the setbacks, and the growth of CEC as an international organization have been well documented by Charles Heuchert in a recent paper from which some of the present information has been culled. In the early years the association had a strong international thrust. At the 1926 annual convention, five world regions were established with chairpersons assigned for each area. Because of lack of resources the network was disbanded, but a similar system was reactivated after the end of World War II. As a matter of fact, a Council chapter was formed in South Africa in 1950, and a director-at-large from Africa sat on the Council's board. However, in the 1950's the Council reduced its international efforts and began to focus its attention on the expansion of special education in the United States and Canada. The Council grew in complexity and size, adding divisions, expanding its publication of books and journals, and reaching in the early 1970's a membership of almost 70,000.

Canada remained an integral part of the Council. Three presidents have been Canadian, and four annual conventions have been held in Canada. Canada eventually

established its own Council for Exceptional Children under the umbrella of the parent organization, and it publishes a journal, the Canadian Journal for Exceptional Children. It has a current membership of over 4,000 which has the same proportion to the national population as is the case with the membership in the United States.

In the early 1970's there was a re-awakening of CEC's broader international interests. Many individual members had intensive contacts with other countries and continents. Personally, I conducted both in 1973 and 1974 an eight-week tour of nine European countries with students from my university, and my experiences there led to an enduring commitment to international special education. Several other universities also arranged tours for their students to Europe, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison had both a semester in Europe study program and international summer seminars on its campus.

In 1972, a cultural exchange agreement was signed between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. As part of this arrangement the then U.S. Office of Education, in cooperation with the Council for Exceptional Children, sent a group of experts to the USSR to study the education of the handicapped in

that country. The American delegation represented a broad range of special interests. Included in the group were William Geer, the late executive director of CEC, Edwin Martin, the associate commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Education for the handicapped, and other present and future leaders in our field. The report on the visit, Windows on Russia, provided an informative record of special education in the USSR.

During these years the annual CEC conventions were abuzz with talks and discussions about international activities, projects, and plans. An international interest group was formed which later was formalized into the International Relations Committee. Many world leaders came to our annual conventions. One was attended by Nils-Ivar Sundberg from UNESCO, and a reception was held in his honor. Olof Magne, representing EASE also participated in one of the conferences.

The international thrust in the 1970's culminated with the CEC's First World Congress on Future Special Education in Stirling, Scotland, in 1978. The event attracted over 2,000 participants from 39 countries. The conference was a great success, in part due to the excellent cooperation from the Scottish people but also because of the unstinting labors of Angie Gialas, Aaron

Armfield, and many others. The congress proceedings which were edited by Albert Fink and called International Perspectives on Future Special Education contains a wealth of information on special education from throughout the world.

A central feature of the Congress was a roundtable which convened for two hours on each of the four days of the conference. It assembled 24 invited special educators from 21 nations to explore strategies for promoting education for exceptional children and youth throughout the world. Observers were also present and had opportunities to interact with the discussants. It is difficult to assess the lasting values of such a congress, but I know about one lady, Sarah deVincentis from Illinois, who met a lekotek leader from Norway there. She became enthused about these Scandinavian toy libraries for the handicapped, went there to study them, and established one of her own in Evanston. She now is the director of a National Lekotek Center and was the driving force behind having the Illinois legislature establish and fund a number of lekoteks throughout the state.

In 1979 the International Relations Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Albert Fink. This

committee tried hard to pursue the momentum that had been gained during the 1970's, but the organization was faced with a number of both financial and policy issues that took precedence. However, Albert Fink convened at the 1980 annual convention a roundtable conference to "review varieties of options for CEC in the developing field of international special education." The symposium included among others Edwin Martin and Fredric Weintraub. At the meeting I presented a paper on directions for the CEC in international special education. Some of the proposals I made then are still pertinent and have been restated in the present recommendations.

During the past couple of years several important developments have taken place.

1. Joseph Ballard, Associate Director of Governmental Relations has taken on an active role as both a liaison within CEC and in establishing contacts with other international organizations.

2. The membership of the IRC was expanded from five to seven members to allow for broader representation.

4. CEC sought and obtained associate membership in Rehabilitation International.

5. The CEC headquarters began to develop a data bank on information relevant to its international interests.

6. An international reception and hospitality committee was implemented.

7. The Teacher Education Division developed under the leadership of Kent Gerlach a strong interest in international teacher education, and an International Interest Group has been formed, headed by Carmen Iannacone. It has already done a remarkable job of delineating goals and initiating action.

8. CEC cooperated with Global Interactions and Chinese authorities in arranging a successful conference and study tour in China in the summer of 1988.

9. The 1987-88 CEC President Charles Heuchert had a strong committment to international special education and made it a top item on his agenda for action. During his tenure he attended a conference in Hungary and participated in the China trip.

## Proposals for the Future

The following recommendations are based upon my own perceptions of the needs for greater international cooperation in special education, the role that CEC has played in the past, and the leadership I believe it is ready to take in the future.

Goal 1. Establish a clearly formulated policy about CEC's commitment to international special education.

Objective 1. Convene a task force of CEC members with a record of international experience and interest to prepare a policy statement in consort with the International Relations Committee (IRC).

Objective 2. Appoint a full-time person with extensive experience and interest in international cooperation as director of a Department of International Special Education within CEC.

Objective 3. Have the director develop with the task force and the IRC a list of objectives and an agenda for action.

Objective 4. Include among the job specifications of the director close cooperation with the IRC and the coordination of divisional efforts.

Goal 2. Work towards the formation of a world-wide organization or council of organizations dedicated to the education of exceptional children and youth.

Objective 1. Establish contacts with and get cooperation from national and international associations with similar interests.

CEC's recent contacts with Rehabilitation International and EASE are good beginnings of such initiatives. With its resources and expertise CEC may eventually assume a role of a central coordinating agency in special education similar to what Rehabilitation International is in the rehabilitation field.

Objective 2. Convene a meeting of representatives of these organizations to arrive at some common goals and ways of implementing them.

Objective 3. Plan a schedule of regular international conferences ranging from world congresses to smaller regional meetings, perhaps focusing on specific issues.

EASE has since its inception had such a format, and much could be learned from its experience in this area.

Goal 3. Promote the dissemination of pertinent information about the education and care of children with special needs to special educators throughout the world.

Objective 1. Consider the creation of another journal with predominantly international coverage.

This organ could complement the two others already in existence, the International Journal of Special Education and the European Journal for Special Needs Education. It might be mentioned that the new Research Division has already taken steps to start an international research journal.

Objective 2. Expand the international coverage of the present CEC journals.

This could be done by having a regular international feature and by accepting more articles and book reviews with international content. An excellent example of this is the Summer 1985 issue of the Journal of the Division of Early Childhood which under Iva McCleary's editorship described early special education in Western Europe.

Objective 2. Expand the international coverage of the ERIC retrieval system.

At present only a small percentage of the references are from other countries, and they are all limited to

publications in the English language. A recent ERIC computer search reprint on international trends in special education prepared by Jeanette Misaka and her co-workers is a promising ERIC initiative.

Objective 3. Draw upon special educators with mastery of other languages to review pertinent new literature in these languages and report on it in the CEC journals.

Objective 4. Unite with other national and and international organizations to form a global documentation and information service.

EASE has already invested much effort in planning such a service, and the Council of Europe has for some years had a multi-language indexing and translation network called the European Documentation and Information System for Education (EUDISED) which includes literature in special education.

Goal 4. Establish a network of programs and contracts that permit students, teachers, and professors to gain personal experience about special education in other lands.

Objective 1. Provide opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to complete some of their studies in other countries.

Objective 2. Promote the international exchange of teachers and professors.

Objective 3. Conduct or support international study tours.

Objective 4. Intensify the efforts to increase foreign representations at CEC conventions.

Goal 5. Promote international research in special education.

Objective 1. Form committees of researchers with interest in comparative special education to explore issues for which international reseach may provide the most reliable answers.

Objective 2. Encourage universities to write research proposals and assist researchers in securing funding by locating agencies and foundations that might be interested in supporting international cooperative and comparative research.

It appears that the Research Division could take on major responsibilities in this area.

Goal 6. Develop a program of cooperation and assistance to third world or developing countries.

The third world presents a complex and troubling picture of enormous needs. While some countries have made great progress, politically, economically, and in education, others are steeped in stagnation and despair. Millions of handicapped and deprived children cry out for help. Some industrialized countries have made substantive efforts to provide special educational services to these children either through voluntary and charitable organizations or through governmental assistance program.

Objective 1. Name a task force to prepare a set of priorities and a plan of action.

Objective 2. Consult and cooperate with international service and handicap organizations some of which have decades of valuable experience in this field.

Objective 3. Develop a consortium of special education departments interested in the developing countries to

plan projects of teacher training together.

These projects may take two forms. One is to cooperate in offering courses and curricula that are relevant to the students. The other is to have a cadre of instructors that may go to the developing countries to teach.

Objective 4. Marshall the CEC resources to lend financial and other aid to third world special education programs.

This could be in the form of direct financial assistance, no matter how modest, to selected schools, packages with books and other teaching materials, and memberships in CEC for needy and deserving individuals. Some countries have no professional organizations in our field, and being part of CEC may be of incalculable value to many embattled special educators on lonely outposts. It seems that student chapters of the CEC might find these tasks a challenge. One option is to participate in the UNESCO Co-Action Program, a project in which donors buy gift coupons to provide assistance in implementing specific projects in developing countries.

## Conclusions

This list of recommendations is by no means complete. Both the International Relations Committee and the Teacher

Education Division have prepared suggestions that should be carefully considered and obviously new ideas will emerge with time.

The topic of this roundtable conference is a positive expression of the growing feeling throughout the world that we are all interdependent and that we all belong together and must work together. There is in some ways an optimism in the air about the future particularly with regard to the relations between the communist countries and the Western democracies. But there are also deepening shadows. Large parts of the third world are sinking deeper into poverty with all its negative implications. In the industrialized nations we have both in Western Europe and in America entered an era of less concern for the disadvantaged and the handicapped. This has resulted in reduced funding for special education, and discouragement and frustration are common among special educators. Perhaps one item on our international agenda should be to band together with our colleagues in other lands for mutual support in furthering the education and welfare of children with special needs.